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Joan Irwin to Mr. Meredith (2 October 1962)

Joan Irwin

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answered 11/28/62

11 Lamport Avenue,
Toronto 5, Ontario, Canada.
October 2, 1962.

Dear Mr. Meredith -

Canada may seem very remote to you particularly in your present terrible isolation, but you do not seem remote to us. We, and most of the rest of the world, are watching with horror as Mississippi is dragged kicking and screaming into the Twentieth Century. It may not be much consolation to you at the moment, but your courage and dignity in the face of outrageous persecution have inspired the deepest admiration and compassion all over the world.

Lest you think that I am some wild-eyed fanatic, I must assure you that I am neither pro-Russian nor anti-American (nor violently vice versa) and that I respect President Kennedy's firmness in insisting on civil rights as a fact rather than an empty phrase. But Mr. Kennedy really has no choice in the matter - the prestige of the United States is at stake. You, however, could have taken the infinitely easier path of attending an already integrated University and I'm sure you often wish you had. By pursuing your present lonely and dangerous course on behalf of your people you prove again, and alas, proof is still needed in some quarters, the hard-won patience, courage and dignity of the Negro.

Note
To be more practical, is there anything we can do for you? We and our friends are writers, critics, radio and television planners and producers or University professors (not all at once, you understand, just some of each) and we have been battering away at prejudice and intolerance in our small ways for years. It occurs to me that perhaps we could help to mitigate your isolation by writing to you regularly which we would be most proud and happy to do if you were agreeable. Several of our friends are in the Political Science and History departments of Universities here and would enjoy exchanging views with you in those fields particularly.

I have little confidence in the integrity of authorities in Oxford, Mississippi so I will register this letter in the hope that it will eventually reach you. Do let me know in what way we can be of service to you. You are a brave man, Mr. Meredith, a man of great value, not only to your race, but to humanity. I hope you will allow us to become your friends.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Irwin
(Mrs. J.M. Irwin)